

6. WILD LIFE PROBLEMS

Mr. Humayun Abdulali's notes on Wild Life in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (Vol. 56 (2): August 1959) make sad reading. The disillusioning thing is that it is not only in Madhya Pradesh that these conditions prevail. They seem to be common all over the sub-continent.

I often wonder whether we are not fighting an almost impossible battle in trying to protect the wild life of our country. I am a tea planter and I live in the High Ranges of Kerala and I have had the opportunity of studying this protection problem at close quarters. I have come to certain conclusions and quote them for your perusal.

1. The vast majority of our people have never heard of the Indian Board of Wild Life, do not know what it stands for, and have no idea about the work it is doing.

2. The vast majority of our people have yet to develop a genuine interest in wild life. I mean sufficient interest to worry about its welfare.

It is highly idealistic to expect a man to treat the Great Indian Bustard with respect when he does not know what the bird looks like, has no appreciation of how it is being rapidly wiped out, and does not understand why we wish to prevent its extermination. To the miscreant his bustard is a goodly bird that will do well for the evening's pot. Similarly, I know of numerous cases of Junglefowl, Spurfowl and Painted Bush Quail snared in traps in the tea and jungle in these hills nearly all the year round. I have watched shot guns go after these birds with the same degree of indiscrimination. I have seen Rainbow Trout floating on our waters after being poisoned. I have seen how a species of mountain goat has been nearly exterminated in these hills. I have known of health-crazy parties going out to slaughter our Black Monkeys for medicinal purposes. I have heard that a flourishing trade in bison meat exists in the foothills of the High Ranges. I was not surprised to read that Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Basset were 'horrified to see two figures carrying rifles' in the Periyar Sanctuary. This is typical of what goes on all the time.

3. It does not matter how many big names are associated with our Wild Life Board. What is important is the influence it has in successfully getting the State Governments to adopt and enforce its resolutions.

4. One Wild Life Week a year is totally insufficient for our needs. What we need is a Wild Life Century in our country.

5. The Wild Life Board and a Society like ours must make concerted attempts to educate our people about natural history. How

we can do this is best left to a subcommittee and to interested educationists. Personally, I think it calls for more emphasis on nature study in our school curricula from the earliest stages.

6. Steps must be taken to see that poachers are really severely punished. There is no point in passing resolutions and making laws if they cannot be enforced.

In the final analysis it all depends on whether we, as a people, want to save our wild life or not. If we do not there is very little that Societies and individuals can do in the matter.

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[We fully agree with our correspondent that so far the Indian Board for Wild Life has not been conspicuously effective in the purpose for which it was constituted. Reports from all over the country continue to confirm the fact that the wild life position is steadily deteriorating; poaching and illicit misuse of crop protection guns, and illegal practices of every kind are on the increase. The members of the Board have stressed again and again, at each successive meeting, that perhaps our most pressing need at the present time is publicity and educating the public to realize that our wild life is a national asset.

As our correspondent points out, it is quite true that the vast majority of people are unaware of the very existence of the Wild Life Board and of the work it is intended to be doing. In a country where literacy is as low as in ours, the only effective way of educating the public on the problems of wild life and the need for its protection would seem to be the movie film. Every successive meeting of the Board has reiterated the urgent need for film documentaries on Indian wild life for countrywide 'plugging' in cinemas in an earnest attempt to awaken interest in the problem. Yet, today, eight years after the formation of the Wild Life Board, we are not aware that any such film has been produced by the Films Division. If such a film has been produced the secret has been well kept. We have not heard of any one having seen it. The Society has certainly never been consulted about its making as one would reasonably have expected. It is obvious that the high ups both in the Central and State governments are not seriously interested in the problem. Otherwise it is inconceivable that so little would be done about it.

It is a disheartening state of affairs and we can sympathize with the pessimistic note struck in the last para above.—EDS.]